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Enze Han, Joseph O'Mahoney and Christopher Paik

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# External kin, economic disparity and minority ethnic group mobilization

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**Enze Han**

SOAS, University of London, UK

**Joseph O'Mahoney**

Seton Hall University, USA

**Christopher Paik**

New York University, Abu Dhabi

## Abstract

What is the relationship between economic grievance and ethno-political conflict? Many theories on ethnic conflict posit a relationship between economic inequality and conflict, and many tend to agree that economic inequality between groups is one of the main causes of grievance and thereby political mobilization. This article engages existing literature on horizontal inequalities, but probes the violent consequences of a different type of economic inequality. In particular, we are interested in the type of ethnic group that has extensive external kin relations, and how in such conditions the economic disparity between the ethnic group and its external kin group condition the former's grievance construction. We argue that, if the ethnic group's external kin enjoys positive economic advantage over the ethnic group, then the latter is more likely to feel deprived and engage in violent political mobilization toward the current host state.

## Keywords

Economic inequality, ethnic conflict, external kin relations

## Introduction

What is the relationship between economic grievance and ethno-political conflict? Many theories on ethnic conflict posit a relationship between economic inequality and conflict, and many tend to agree that economic inequality between groups is one of the main causes of

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### Corresponding author:

Enze Han, Department of Politics and International Studies, SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK.

Email: [eh22@soas.ac.uk](mailto:eh22@soas.ac.uk)

grievance and thereby political mobilization (Gurr, 1970; Russett, 1964). Yet there are disagreements about the exact nature of this relationship (Lichbach, 1989). In some situations seemingly economically advantaged groups pursue political mobilization owing to resentment at the transfer of wealth to less-developed groups (Rogowski, 1985) or for fear of being exploited by the centralizing state (Hale, 2008). However, in other situations, it is the poorer groups that are most politically assertive, owing to perhaps their economically dominated status (Hechter, 1975). This indicates that the relationship between economic well-being and group mobilization might be a complicated one. What researchers need to do is pay attention to the conditionalization of the economic inequality and conflict relationship, and try to figure out specific mechanisms and conditions under which economic inequality leads to conflict (Lichbach, 1989: 465).

Most recent advancements in the literature on civil wars continue to put strong emphasis on the prominent role of economic inequality (Sambanis, 2005; Stewart, 2008). Indeed, researchers employing the concept of horizontal inequalities have produced a growing array of quantitative work that showcases the crucial role of economic inequality in promoting ethnonationalist conflict (Cederman et al., 2011; Østby, 2008; Østby et al., 2009). In particular, Cederman et al. (2011: 478) combine newly geocoded data on ethnic groups' settlement areas with spatial wealth estimates, and argue that "both rich and poor groups fight more often than those groups whose wealth lies closer to the country average".

This article engages existing literature on horizontal inequalities, but probes the violent consequences of a different type of economic inequality. Rather than looking at economic inequality between the minority and majority in a domestic setting, as the literature on horizontal inequality usually does, we examine the role of *transnational* economic inequality. In particular, we are interested in the type of ethnic group that has extensive external kin relations, and how in such conditions the economic disparity between the ethnic group and its external kin group affects the former's grievance construction toward the host state. In such a triadic relationship between an ethnic group, its external kin and the host state (Brubaker, 1996; Weiner, 1971), we argue that economic grievance of the ethnic group is partly constructed on the basis of a comparative framework involving the group and its external kin. If the ethnic group's external kin enjoys a positive economic advantage over the ethnic group, then the latter is more likely to feel deprived and mobilize politically toward the current host state. Thus, our conceptualization is different from previous approaches that focus on domestic inequality between majority and minorities. Rather, we pursue a different setting in which economic equality or inequality is channeled through a comparative framework involving a third actor—the external kin of the ethnic minority group.

This proposition has strong theoretical grounds in the social psychology literature on social comparison (Masters and Smith, 1987; Stapel and Blanton, 2006; Suls and Miller, 1977; Suls and Wheeler, 2000; Suls and Wills, 1991). In particular, we argue that this propensity for an ethnic group to compare with its external kin is due to assumed group attributes and psychological closeness. Such a statement is based on the "similarity hypothesis" proposed by Leon Festinger (1954), which contends that comparisons often occur with people that are similar. It follows that, rather than comparing with different domestic others, it is likely that an ethnic group would think that comparison with its external kin, with which the group shares a common or similar cultural background, is the most meaningful and politically salient.

This proposition is also partly informed by empirical evidence of ethnic conflict behavior around the world. One good example is the Uighurs in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region in

China. For the past three decades, Uighur pro-independence movements have intensified their mobilization with increasingly violent means (Dillon, 2004; Millward, 2004). Although the Chinese government's policy is much to blame for the grievance of the Uighurs, a different aspect of the Uighurs' agitation is that they continue to look toward other Turkic people in Central Asia and Turkey. They compare themselves with the Turkic people outside of China and lament their relative poverty. Many Uighur people consider "areas outside Xinjiang, former Soviet Central Asia and Turkey in particular, as clean and civilized in contrast to the poor and unclean conditions of [their] homeland" (Roberts, 2004: 228). In the Uighurs' case, their conception of economic inequality and their sense of economic grievance are partly constructed by their comparison with their external kin, which provides a possible motive for political mobilization. The Malay Muslims in three provinces in Southern Thailand are in a similar situation. Ethnic violence has engulfed the population for the past few years. By March 2008, the violence in southern Thailand had consumed over 3000 lives, and the conflict between the Malay Muslims and the Thai state is still ongoing (Funston, 2008: 5). Although political and cultural alienation from the Thai state remain salient (McCargo, 2008), another factor that intensifies the Thai Muslims' grievance is their relative poverty in comparison with their external kin in Malaysia (Klanarong, 2009). The lack of economic development in Southern Thailand and especially Thai Muslims' sense of loss and neglect when they compare Thailand with their external kin state Malaysia, has contributed to their continuing resistance towards the Thai state. It thus seems that ethnic minorities sometimes compare their conditions with those of their external kin and mobilize accordingly. This article probes the generalizability of this dynamic, exploring the extent to which this dynamic might exist in other places.<sup>1</sup>

This article is divided into the following sections. In the first section we review the existing literature on the relationship between economic inequality and ethnic group mobilization, in order to identify the inadequacies in current conceptions of the economic foundations for group action. We then propose to examine a certain type of ethnic group, one which has extensive external kin relations, and suggest a possible way to conceptualize how these ethnic groups might form their evaluation of their economic well-being by comparison with their external kin group. Here in conjunction with a review of existing explanations for ethnic conflict, we generate our hypotheses for empirical testing. The second section investigates the generalizability of our key hypothesis. We utilize a reconstructed version of the Minority At Risk dataset (MAR), using data on 283 politically active ethnic groups throughout the world from 1945 to 2000, in juxtaposition with the Geo-referenced Ethnic Power Relations (GeoEPR) and Geographically based Economic data (G-Econ) to generate a set of group-level tests on the relationship between ethnic group/kin economic disparity and ethnic group political mobilization. The results show strong support for our theoretical hypothesis. The empirical analysis part is followed by a discussion of our findings, their strengths and limitations, and then a conclusion of the broad theoretical contribution of our study.

## **Economic inequality and ethnic mobilization**

There is a vast literature on the relationship between economic variables and ethnic group political mobilization. One of the classic concepts is relative deprivation, which posits that economic inequality rather than absolute poverty is the main cause for group grievance, and such inequality increases the possibility for violent conflict (Gurr, 1970). However, later

studies questioned this relationship between economic inequality and political mobilization, and have in general dismissed such group-based grievances as sufficient causal factors for conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Debates about whether economic inequality matters for conflict wages on, and most recently scholars have pointed out the inappropriateness of previous studies relying overwhelmingly upon individual-level statistical proxies, such as the Gini coefficient, to study group-based conflict behavior (Cederman et al., 2011: 480). Instead, calls have been made to specifically focus on group-level inequality, or what Stewart (2002: 3) defines as “horizontal inequalities to differentiate them from the normal inequality over the range of individuals”. Utilizing new data and research methods, empirical researchers operationalizing this concept of horizontal inequalities have produced consistent statistical support for the positive relations between group-based inequalities and group conflict behavior (Cederman et al., 2011; Østby, 2008; Østby et al., 2009).

That being said, there is much disagreement about whether economically disadvantaged groups or advantaged groups are more likely to pursue political mobilization. We can posit that economically disadvantaged groups are more likely to feel deprived and develop a strong grievance, facilitating collective action for group mobilization. Michael Hechter, for example, considers the least developed ethnically distinct region as the most likely to pursue a political separatism. Because of their domination and exploitation by the economic and political center, it is only natural for the poor region to rebel against the injustice imposed on them (Hechter, 1975). On the other hand, a rich and industrialized region, owing to its dependence on inter-regional trade within a union state, would be the least separatist because they have more to lose from the rupture of economic ties (Hechter and Levi, 1979). Donald Horowitz also argues that poor regions are more disposed to secession, albeit by a different set of logics. Horowitz contends that backward groups in backward regions are the most likely to pursue separatist movements because the educated elites from this group will benefit the most from the creation of a new state, despite the fact that the whole region will suffer if it opts for secession (Horowitz, 1981).

On the other hand, we can also think that advantaged groups might initiate mobilization to prevent the possibility of being taken advantage of by the less advantaged ones, especially regarding resource redistribution (Stewart, 2000). Henry Hale presents the logic of this argument as being that the reason why the richest ethnic regions are the most secessionist is that “they have the most to lose should they be exploited by other groups who control the state” (Hale, 2000: 32). We can thus imagine that, because of the wealth and the relatively advanced level of development in an ethnic region, it is rational for members of this group to be more proud of it and thus put more salience on their own identity rather than on the union state level. At the same time, fear of exploitation by the center motivates group members to rally behind the secessionist banner. On the other hand, if an ethnic region is poor and heavily dependent upon the center for subsidy, then people of this group are less likely to favor secession (Bartkus, 1999: 38).

How can we reconcile these competing yet seemingly contradictory propositions? One possibility is that both rich and poor regions are susceptible to political violence (Toft, 2003). Most recently, Cederman et al. (2011: 478) reached the same conclusion as they found that “both rich and poor groups fight more often than those groups whose wealth lies closer to the country average”. Not disputing the validity of such arguments, here we propose a different framework through which to think about the impact of economic inequality. Economic development and group well-being are often embedded in different historical and

social conditions. As a result of these contextual differences, people might develop divergent interpretations and understandings of their economic interest (Herrera, 2005). One common assumption in the civil war literature is that, since “civil wars take place within societies, they [researchers] assume as well that the key causes of conflict must also be found within the boundaries of formally independent nation-states” (Cederman et al., 2009: 404). For this reason, the existing literature on horizontal inequalities tends to focus specifically on the economic disparity between ethnic minorities and the majority group within a domestic setting. However, we contend that there is no necessity that economic inequality has to be framed in that way. A different type of economic inequality might also exist outside of the conventional domestic setting. This is the inequality between an ethnic group and its kin relations residing in a different state (Brubaker, 1996; Weiner, 1971). The proposition of the existence of such an economic inequality between an ethnic group and its external kin, as well as the subsequent psychological effect of such comparison on the said ethnic group, adds more complexity to the underlying relationship between economic factors and political mobilization (Blattman and Miguel, 2010: 18).

Indeed, in the civil war literature, there has already been extensive research that explores how external kin groups affect ethnic group political mobilization and conflict processes (Cetinyan, 2002; Davis and Moore, 1997; Forsberg, 2008; Gurr, 1993; Jenne, 2007; Saideman, 1997, 2001; Saideman and Ayres, 2000; Van Houten, 1998). Gleditsch (2007), for example, points out that, the more trans-boundary ethnic groups there are in a country, the higher that country’s risk of conflict. Cederman et al. (2009) similarly show that external kin support increases the risk of conflict, although the impact is mainly with minority groups that are relatively large.

Following this line of research on the role of external kin, we argue that the presence of external kin provides an alternative channel to frame the existence of economic inequality. We argue an ethnic minority group pays special attention to the situation of its external kin. In such a triadic relationship the ethnic minority group’s perceptions and understandings of group economic interests and its evaluations of its welfare are channeled through a comparative framework that involves a comparison between the group and its external kin.

Vital to this model is the notion that ethnic minority groups treat their external kin as a reference category. In his classic work *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Robert Gurr talks about how relative deprivation contributes to group mobilization for violence. Gurr specifically points out that a certain group’s value standards are set against a reference framework that involves some other groups that this group identifies with (Gurr, 1970: 24). Although Gurr’s primary focus is on minority/majority comparison and grievance in a domestic setting, he also notes in passing that similar groups tend to be chosen as the reference group (Gurr, 1970: 106).

Indeed, Leon Festinger’s “similarity hypothesis” states that people do not compare themselves with random strangers, but “[g]iven a range of possible persons for comparison, someone close to one’s own ability or opinion will be chosen for comparison” (Festinger, 1954: 118). This “similarity hypothesis” has inspired generations of social psychologists to seek theoretical clarification and empirical validation (Goethals and Darley, 1977; Major and Forcey, 1985; Meisel and Blumberg, 1990; Miller et al., 1988; Tesser, 1988; Zagelka and Brown, 2005).

This strong theoretical footing in the social psychology literature shows support for why external kin groups tend to be chosen as the reference category by an ethnic minority group. Sharing common or similar cultural backgrounds, an ethnic group’s external kin offers the most meaningful comparison candidate because of the assumed similarity in group attributes

and psychological closeness. Rather than comparing with the different domestic other, a.k.a the majority group, it is likely that an ethnic group will think that comparison with its external kin is the most fitting. Thus, sharing a common ethnic identity with its external kin provides a common psychological framework for group members to make sense of social reality, because such a framework provides people with a “set of personal points of reference that locate the self in the social world” (Hale, 2004: 468).

Comparisons with external kin are not only the most meaningful, but can also exert a significant psychological effect on the group that non-similar groups cannot. Particularly if people believe that they cannot achieve the same as their comparable peer, such comparisons would have a negative psychological effect on them (Burleson et al., 2005; Gibbons and McCoy, 1991; Leach and Smith, 2006). This psychological effect in turn forms the foundation for the ethnic group’s grievance towards the host state and the majority group. Theories of horizontal inequalities generally contend that a group would mobilize against the political center to redress inter-group disparities of wealth, because the dominant group is the one that holds the disproportionate wealth and can therefore redistribute that wealth to redress these disparities. The logic of our argument goes a different way, in that we contend the psychological impact of negative comparison between an ethnic group and its external kin would in a way compel the ethnic group to scapegoat the central state for hampering the group’s chance for economic advancement as achieved by their external kin.

We thus argue that, if the ethnic minority group perceives that their external kin enjoys better economic conditions than the group, members of this group might develop negative appraisals of their lives, become dissatisfied, start to demand more from the state and have a higher possibility of rebellion. On the other hand, if a group realizes that their external kin’s living conditions are worse than their own, then group members are more likely to endure the current hardship, if there is any, and be more content with their situation within the majority-controlled home state than one would otherwise predict. We therefore propose that *ethnic minority groups’ violent political mobilization toward the host state is correlated with whether their external kin enjoys higher levels of economic development.*<sup>3</sup>

## Data introduction and empirical strategy

The key to our analysis is how to measure the economic disparity between ethnic groups and corresponding external kin groups. The hypothesis of interest only posits a difference between the mobilization potential of ethnic groups with kin groups of varying levels of relative economic development. There is no implication for a comparison between ethnic groups with external kin and those without, a separate research topic addressed in other works (i.e. Cederman et al., 2009; Davis and Moore, 1997). For the purpose of empirically testing our hypothesis, we utilize the Minority At Risk dataset from years 1945 to 2000. MAR tracks 283 politically active ethnic groups throughout the world from 1945. The classification under which MAR categorizes ethnopolitical, non-state communal groups to have “political significance” is determined by whether “the group collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-a-vis other groups in a society”, and whether “the group is the basis for political mobilization and collective action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests” (Minority At Risk Project, 2009).

While the MAR classification yields a smaller set of ethnic groups than the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset,<sup>4</sup> MAR identifies an external kin relations variable (GC10A) for each

ethnic group. EPR on the other hand does not provide information on the kin group or country where the largest kindred group for the ethnic group resides.<sup>5</sup> This is one main reason why we utilize the MAR instead of the EPR. Exactly how each ethnic group constructs its identity and the kin group it uses as a reference is a complex, multifaceted issue, including different levels and “nested” identities. Therefore, there might be issues relating to scales of identity under consideration in our analysis, which cannot be easily addressed without contextual analysis. Using the MAR external kin relations data as a proxy for this identification might fail to capture some of this complexity but is a reasonable first cut at addressing this issue systematically. Also, by using the MAR, we limit our analysis to groups with a history of discrimination and subsequent mobilization, the implication of which will be discussed later in the article.

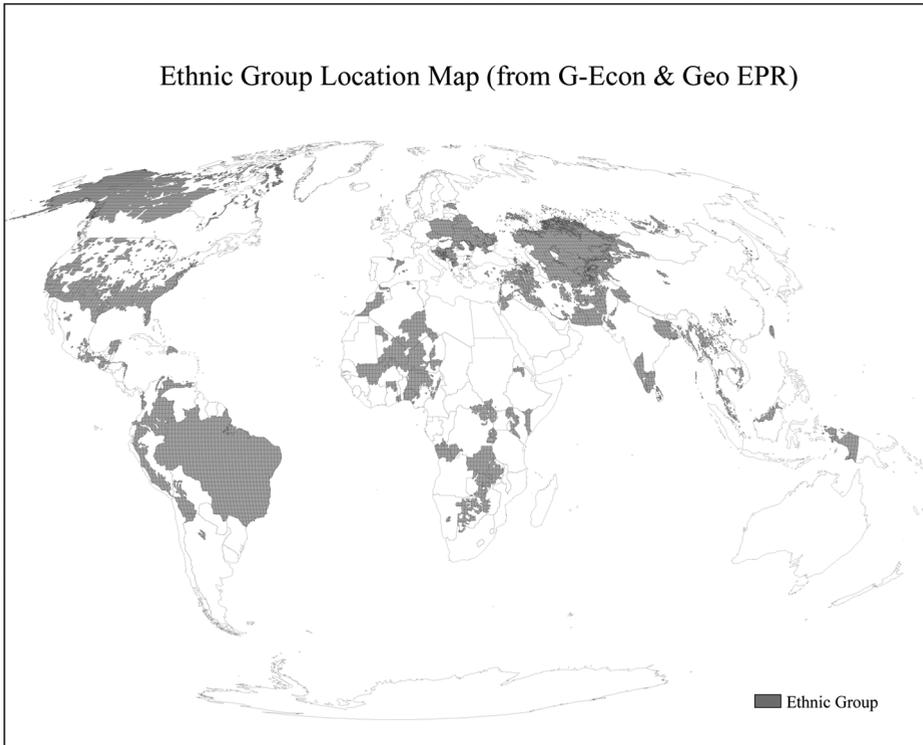
We are interested only in ethnic groups that have external kin relations in our analysis. One crucial problem for many previous studies on ethnic group conflict is that group-level data are very difficult to obtain. In our case, given the definition of the economic disparity variable as between an ethnic group and its external kin group, using the country-level per capita gross domestic product (GDP) data is likely to lead to serious measurement errors. To overcome this problem, we have to find a way to measure economic development at the group level. While MAR identifies the main kin group for each ethnic group, it does not provide the group location or economic standing at the group level. We therefore match the groups (those with kin groups from MAR) with a dataset that can give us a measure of economic development at the group level. That is, we explore a localized approach to investigate the kin group effect using two geo-referenced datasets. The first is a group dataset in 1990 from the G-Econ project for geographically based economic data (Nordhaus et al., 2006);<sup>6</sup> the second is the GeoEPR<sup>7</sup> dataset in Geographic Information System format (Wucherpfennig et al., 2010), providing the bases and settlement patterns of the ethnic groups included in the EPR dataset.<sup>8</sup> First, G-Econ provides a geophysically based dataset on economic activity at the 1° longitude by 1° latitude resolution at a global scale. The data calculates the “gross cell product” for each of the  $1 \times 1^\circ$  cells, following the same concept as GDP at the state level. Using gridded population data, the gross cell product (GCP) for each grid cell is calculated as follows:

$$\text{GCP by grid cell} = (\text{population by grid cell}) \times (\text{GCP/population}) \text{ by grid cell}$$

The GCP/population is obtained from a variety of data including national, state and county data depending on their availability from each country. Given the varying administrative capability of countries, the quality of the data is much better for developed nations with detailed socioeconomic accounts at disaggregated subnational levels. In the case that a grid cell occupies multiple countries, the gross cell product is the area-weighted sum of the countries’ reported output.

On the other hand, GeoEPR geo-references ethnic groups from the EPR dataset. For the purpose of this article, all of the ethnic groups included in GeoEPR with names substantially the same as those listed in the MAR dataset were kept. We then obtained geographic information on the location and spread of this set of ethnic groups, and placed this information on top of the G-Econ data, which provides at the grid cell level the economic output and population. Summing all the cells that cover an ethnic group gives the economic output and the total population in the region.

Since this section focuses on the group-level analysis of the kin group effect, the following empirical analysis only includes pairs of groups that have geographic information available.



**Figure 1.** Ethnic group location map (from G-Econ and Geo EPR).

That is, if an ethnic group is matched to its kin group, but there is no information on the kin group from GeoEPR, then the observation is dropped. The resulting number of pairs of ethnic groups and their kin groups, both of which have geophysical location and spread information, is 141. Figure 1 shows the world distribution of ethnic groups included in our analysis.

The main variable of interest here is the wealth of a localized ethnic group relative to its kin group. The ratio of wealth is measured as the following:

$$\text{ratio of ethnic group to kin group} = \frac{\text{total gross product per capita by ethnic group}}{\text{total gross product per capita by kin group}}$$

Here the total gross product per capita is obtained by summing the GCP of all the cells occupied by the group, divided by the total group population in all the cells.

The dependent variable is a binary variable, equal to 0 if there was no reported political mobilization and 1 otherwise from the MAR REBEL variable between 1945 and 2000. Since the binary approach may omit potentially important variations in the extent of rebellious activity participated in by a group, we also look at the mean REBEL variable. This variable ranges in value from 0 to 7, with 0 as no rebellion reported and 7 as protracted civil war. Using the mean REBEL may change implications drawn from the binary approach, since

the motivation behind each increasing level of violent political mobilization (e.g. scattered terrorism (REBEL = 1) to large-scale insurgency (REBEL = 6)) may significantly differ from deciding to act violently in any form as opposed to peaceful means.<sup>9</sup>

It is necessary to address other potential channels through which ethnic group mobilization may result, and test whether our claim holds, controlling for these other factors, so we control for a set of variables that are commonly associated with ethnic group mobilization. Existing explanations for ethnic group mobilization can be roughly divided into two main approaches—the first one dealing mainly with group grievance as motivation for mobilization and the other with opportunity structures that permit a group to mobilize successfully.

The first set of approaches puts the focus squarely on an ethnic group's grievance as the motivations for mobilization and rebellion. These approaches are thus inspired by the relative deprivation theory as we mentioned previously (e.g. Gurr, 1970; Horowitz, 1985). Thus, economic differences between the minority group and the majority, a.k.a horizontal inequalities, are often blamed for the minority group's grievance. Alternatively, studies have shown consistently that poverty is strongly correlated with ethnic conflict, in the sense that low per capita incomes and slow economic growth are both robustly linked to civil war (Blattman and Miguel, 2010).

This economic discontent would certainly be correlated with any political inequalities between the ethnic minority group and the ruling majority, wherein the minority group suffers political marginalization and lack of access to political power. Political exclusion has been documented as one main contributor to ethnic violent conflict (Cederman et al., 2010b; Wimmer et al., 2009). If an ethnic group is constantly excluded from the political process, this intensifies feelings of alienation and injustice, which then presumably pave the way for political action. Similarly, an ethnic minority's grievance within the current state can also be dependent on whether the group has historically been autonomous or independent. For a group that historically enjoyed its own freedom, it is presumably more difficult for group members to make sense of the current domination by others, which foments grievance and creates a demand for greater autonomy. Alternatively, an autonomous structure might also provide resources for groups to overcome the collective action problem (Cornell, 2002).

There are also approaches that look at the cultural variable—that is, treating ethnic and cultural diversity as a cause of civil conflict. However, some quantitative analyses of this relationship do not find such a relationship at all (Collier et al., 2004; Fearon, 2004). Cultural or ethnic differences between the two can make inter-ethnic communication difficult, and can lead to alienation of the minority group and a strong sense of non-belonging within the current state. The situation may be especially prone to conflict if there is ethnic polarization involved (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005). Finally, we might also posit that democratic societies are probably more inclusive than authoritarian regimes, and thus are less conflict-prone, although recent studies tend to portray this as a parabolic relationship between regime type and ethnic political mobilization (Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2002; Hegre et al., 2001).

MAR includes several measures of difference between the minority group and the majority group in the same country between 1945 and 2000. We include the time-averaged composite indices for economic differences (ECDIFXX), political differences (POLDIFXX) and ethnic differences (ETHDIFXX).<sup>10</sup> Because changes in the location of ethnic groups over time are not captured by GeoEPR data, the following regression results are necessarily pooled over the time period. To measure the effect of country regime types, we also include the mean polity scores for the country where the ethnic group resides. To measure the impact of historical autonomy, we include a dichotomous variable from MAR that indicates

whether the group has been historically autonomous (AUTON). Finally, we also control for the ratio of group gross product per capita (GPPC) to that of the state that the ethnic group is in.<sup>11</sup> This measure is a proxy for the relative economic standing of the ethnic group to the rest of the population in the country.

Other than these grievance-based variables, we also try to control for some factors that provide opportunities and resources for ethnic conflict (e.g. McAdam et al., 2001). One factor that has been noticed by scholars that is supposed to correlate strongly with group mobilization is how much a certain group is geographically concentrated. The argument is that groups that are geographically concentrated enjoy higher levels of political, social and economic self-sufficiency (Jenne et al., 2007: 542). Also, it is much easier for such groups to justify their claims for independence based on ethnic homogeneity (Toft, 2002). Furthermore, compact groups are presumably more likely to defend themselves.

Other than group concentration, group size is also considered relevant for political mobilization (Buhaug et al., 2008; Cederman et al., 2009). Owing to their size, large groups are more likely to challenge the central state owing to their superior size; they can also effectively mobilize more resources than smaller groups. In addition, it is also possible that an ethnic group's potential for political mobilization increases with the extent of political access its external kin enjoy. This means that, if the external kin group has more access to political power, then presumably the potential for it to support the ethnic group for mobilization will also increase.

Therefore, we include in our model three additional variables. GROUPCON is from MAR, and measures group concentration level. GC11 is also from MAR, and measures the extent to which external kin groups have access to political power. Finally, we include the total population of ethnic groups from the G-Econ dataset.

EPR also provides a number of potentially suitable control variables. These include indicators for whether the ethnic group is excluded from power (EXCLUDED), discriminated against (DISCRIM) or powerless (POWERLESS, STAT), and whether the group has autonomy (AUTONOMY, SEPARATIST). The MAR indicators were used in their place since only 21 groups in the EPR data (out of a total of 63 that had these variables in EPR) had identified kin groups, compared with a total of 141 groups with MAR indicators.

## **Findings**

Table 1 shows summary statistics. A total of 141 ethnic groups from 79 countries are included in the dataset. On average, ethnic groups fared better than their kin, as shown by the average economic disparity measure of 1.42. This indicates that, in the dataset, ethnic groups actually have better economic standings than their kin by roughly 40%. The variance among the ethnic group and kin pairs is significant. For example, the relative economic standing among Russians living in Tajikistan relative to their kin in Russia is 0.21, while the relative economic standing among Malaysian Chinese compared with their kin in China is over 7.

The mean rebellion index is close to 1, suggesting that the majority of political mobilization effort resulted in banditry and sporadic terrorism, rather than civil war and large guerilla attacks. In fact, out of 138 observations, about half of the ethnic groups (62) witnessed zero reported incidents of political mobilization against the dominant groups.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1.** Summary statistics

	Description	Observed	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Economic disparity variable from G-Econ, GeoEPR and MAR</i>				
Group GPPC/kin GPPC	Relative economic disparity measure between ethnic group and its kin	141	1.42	1.36
GPPC in 1990 (in US\$000 PPP)	Group level GPPC	141	5.27	5.75
Ratio of group GPPC to host state GDP per capita	Relative economic disparity measure between ethnic group and other state residents	138	0.0032	0.0017
Total population of ethnic group in millions		141	6.78	28.99
<i>Political mobilization variable from MAR</i>				
Binary rebellion index	Equal to 1 if there was a known record of political mobilization	138	0.55	0.50
Mean rebellion index (REBEL)	Mean mobilization effort level (values ranging from 0 to 7; 1 indicates political banditry, sporadic terrorism, and 7 indicates protracted civil war)	138	1.17	1.78
<i>Intrastate grievance controls from MAR</i>				
Mean economic differentials index (ECDIFXX)	Seven-category scale (values from -2 to 4) of intergroup differentials in economic status and positions: -2 indicates advantaged group, and 4 indicates extreme differentials	135	1.59	1.91
Mean political differentiation index (POLDIFXX)	Seven-category scale (values from -2 to 4) of intergroup differentials in political status and positions: -2 indicates advantaged group, and 4 indicates extreme differentials	131	1.62	1.60
Mean Polity index (POLITY)	Polity IV Regime Score (values from -10 to 10)	136	-1.27	5.60
<i>Intrastate opportunity structures controls from MAR</i>				
Mean Groupcon groups spatial distribution (GROUPCON)	A summary indicator, values from 0 to 3; 0 indicates widely spread, and 3 indicates concentrated in one region	140	5.70	2.77
Mean ethnic difference (ETHDIFXX)	General indicator for the level of distinctness of group from the dominant group in country, based on language, customs and culture	141	2.25	0.99
Mean historical autonomy (AUTON)	Equal to 1 if group was historically autonomous	140	0.19	0.40

PPP, Purchasing power parity.

Table 2 presents results for which the dependent variable is a binary variable, equal to 0 if there was no reported political mobilization and 1 otherwise. Both ordinary least squares (OLS) and probit specification yield similar results. The economic disparity variable has a negative and statistically significant coefficient. Column 4, for example, suggests that a unit

**Table 2.** Rebellion and relative wealth of kin group (OLS)

Variables	(1) OLS	(2) OLS	(3) OLS	(4) Probit: df/dx	(5) Probit: df/dx	(6) Probit: df/dx
Group GPPC/kin GPPC	-0.069*** (0.022)	-0.070*** (0.022) 0.022	-0.056* (0.033) 0.003	-0.078** (0.030)	-0.084** (0.033) 0.025	-0.085** (0.048) 0.009
Mean economic differentiation index (MAR)		(0.028) -0.008	(0.028) 0.007		(0.029) -0.010	(0.032) 0.003
Mean political differentiation index (MAR)		(0.035) -0.008	(0.034) -0.010		(0.035) -0.008	(0.037) -0.011
Mean Polity IV regime score		(0.009) 0.006	(0.009) 0.006		(0.009) 0.007	(0.010) 0.009
GPPC in 1990, in US\$000, PPP		(0.008)	(0.007)		(0.009)	(0.008)
Ratio of group GPPC to host state GDP per capita			-60.899**			-67.055**
Mean ethnic difference (MAR)			(28.212)			(29.594)
Mean group spatial distribution			-0.022			-0.027
Mean historical autonomy (MAR)			(0.018)			(0.020)
Total population of ethnic group in millions, 1990			0.045			0.061
Mean kin group access to political power index (MAR)			(0.048)			(0.052)
Constant	0.650*** (0.057)	0.543*** (0.095)	(0.043) 0.978***			(0.047)
Observations	138	126	122	138	126	122
Adjusted/pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.036	0.042	0.150	0.0278	0.0333	0.122
	0.0291	0.00197	0.0652			

Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$ .

increase in the ratio between the group per capita gross product and kin per capita gross product is related to a decrease in the likelihood of experiencing political mobilization of 7.8%. The negative correlation between the two variables remains significant with inclusion of control variables. The localized ethnic group's GDP per capita also plays a positive but insignificant role.

The results also show that, when focusing only on ethnic groups that have identifiable kin groups, factors commonly attributed to political mobilization are not as significant, with the exception of the kin group's access to political power. Given the focus of this empirical exercise, this finding is not surprising. To our knowledge no prior work has focused specifically on the ethnic groups with kin group relations and their grievances against the central state. This finding suggests that, at least within the subset of ethnic groups that have kin groups, their grievance outcomes are much more strongly impacted by kinship factors, rather than domestic ethnopolitical and historical variables. The marginal effect value of  $-0.108$  under column 6, for example, suggests that a unit increase in the access index score is likely to decrease the likelihood of experiencing political mobilization by 10.8%. A country's level of economic differentiation, geographic isolation and sense of historical autonomy appear to positively influence the likelihood of a political act, although none of them are statistically significant. On the other hand, both ethnic differentiation and democracy levels have negative coefficient values, suggesting that these factors are negatively correlated with political mobilization.

Using a binary dependent variable may potentially overlook important variation in the intensity level of rebellions outlined in MAR. Furthermore with the binary dependent variable, the political differentiation and absolute wealth of ethnic groups appear to have the opposite effect from what one would expect from the current literature. Table 3 presents results using the mean rebellion index as the dependent variable instead. Given the nature of the data, which contains many zero rebellion observations and is potentially truncated, we present both OLS and Tobit regressions. The findings broadly confirm the negative correlation that we observe from Table 2. Column 1 suggests that a unit increase in the economic disparity ratio will probably see a decrease in the mean rebellion index by a factor of 0.213, and the magnitude of the disparity coefficient value increases significantly under the Tobit specification. The kin group access variable also remains statistically significant, while domestic sociopolitical variables do not. Under the OLS specification, the overall economic standing of ethnic groups and their total population also appear to have statistically negative correlations with the rebellion index, although the magnitudes are small. Columns 2 and 3 suggest that a thousand-dollar increase, about a 20% increase from the mean per capita growth product, is likely to decrease the mean rebellion index by 0.031.

## Sensitivity analysis

We have used several different estimation procedures with different specifications of the dependent variable and the main result is consistent across models. This section considers further tests of the robustness of the above findings.<sup>13</sup> The economic disparity variable was calculated without reference to the source of the wealth production. One potential issue is how easy it would be to restrict or redistribute economic wealth among members of different ethnic groups, or even a particular sense of grievance arising from the exploitation of natural resources coming from a group's homeland. Income from oil production may involve

**Table 3.** Rebellion and relative wealth of kin group (OLS)

Variables	(1) OLS	(2) OLS	(3) OLS	(4) Tobit	(5) Tobit	(6) Tobit
Group GPPC/kin GPPC	-0.213*** (0.063)	-0.088** (0.044) 0.057	-0.111 (0.079) 0.057	-0.575** (0.240)	-0.391* (0.229) 0.141	-0.382 (0.271) 0.103
Mean economic differentiation index (MAR)						
Mean political differentiation index (MAR)		(0.086) 0.054	(0.087) 0.029		(0.153) 0.030	(0.163) 0.031
Mean Polity IV regime score		(0.083) -0.009	(0.074) -0.006	(0.178) -0.030		(0.184) -0.036
GPPC in 1990, in US\$000, PPP		(0.024) -0.033*	(0.028) -0.028	(0.046) -0.017		(0.047) -0.011
Ratio of group GPPC to host state GDP per capita		(0.018)	(0.017) 45.588	(0.041)		(0.042) -96.856
Mean ethnic difference (MAR)			(84.218) -0.001			(146.612) -0.048
Mean group spatial distribution			(0.057) 0.012			(0.093) 0.154
Mean historical autonomy (MAR)			(0.120) 0.539			(0.248) 0.872
Total population of ethnic group in millions, 1990			(0.435) -0.005**			(0.569) -0.001
Mean kin group access to political power index (MAR)			(0.002) -0.273**			(0.007) -0.525**
Constant	1.469*** (0.214) 138	1.021*** (0.239) 126	(0.130) 1.632** (0.637) 122	0.991** (0.401) 138	0.289 (0.503) 126	(0.227) 1.899* (1.064) 122
Observations		0.027	0.117			
Adjusted/pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.0197	0.00873	0.0287	0.0144	0.0163	0.0414

Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$ .

different dynamics from other types of economic opportunities. The G-Econ data do not allow for differentiation between different sources of wealth. Instead, using Fearon and Laitin's (2003) data, we controlled for whether the country in which an ethnic group mainly resides derives at least one-third of its export revenues from fossil fuel. The magnitude, direction and significance of the coefficient of interest were not substantially different when including this measure in our models. Fearon and Laitin also emphasize mountainous terrain, a proxy for whether a group has the potential to retreat to an inaccessible location to hide from government forces. Including their measure of mountainous terrain had little or no effect on the main results.

Another potential concern is whether the ethnic groups are primarily rural or urban. The MAR variable GC119 is a measure of rural/urban distribution.<sup>14</sup> We used the value coded for the decade 1990–1999. For the groups included in our data, 33 of them do not have a “basis for judgment”, leaving 99 groups with some value on this variable. After controlling for rural/urban distribution, the magnitude and significance of the coefficient on the kin disparity measure were substantially unchanged. We also controlled for world regions.<sup>15</sup> Including all region dummies at once in the models with a dummy dependent variable left the magnitude and direction of the coefficient of interest unchanged, and significance still high except in the model in which we also controlled for oil and terrain. This was the same for probit estimation. When using the disaggregated dependent variable and running an OLS on the mean, the coefficient again only lost significance in this model, as it did in the Tobit. However, the direction and magnitude of the coefficient were not affected by controlling for world regions, suggesting that the issue is one of insufficient observations or multicollinearity.

Another robustness test we performed was to rerun the models on G-Econ data and MAR rebellion data only from the post-Cold War period (1991–2000), since the temporal scope of G-Econ database is limited to 1990. Under this restriction we found that the direction of the coefficient value and the statistical significance remained robust under the binary approach. The decision to pursue a type of violent rebellion, whether through guerilla attacks or protracted civil wars over this period, was significantly related to the economic disparity level between the ethnic group and the kin in 1990. Similar to the main findings in this paper, the relative economic wealth reduced the likelihood of an ethnic group rebelling against the state. This relationship also remained strong when the dependent variable was the mean REBEL score between 1991 and 2000, although the statistical significance disappeared after controls were added to the regression. The variation in the intensity level increased standard errors in the result. In a closer look, during this period the relative frequency of violent rebellions among MAR groups also increased: out of 955 observations recorded in MAR between 1991 and 2000, only about half of incidents (529) involved non-violent demonstrations or symbolic resistance. In contrast, between 1945 and 2000 the majority of incidents (6528 out of 9063) appear to have been peaceful with no report of violence. The overall trend seems to be of less frequent political mobilization but of a more violent nature.

## Discussion

Our group-level analyses have shown strong support for our main theoretical hypothesis. These statistical results indicate that there is a correlation between the economic disparity between ethnic groups and their external kin groups and the level of rebellious activity

experienced by the ethnic groups. There are two ways of interpreting this finding. The first is in terms of potential generalizability of the mechanism or dynamic we noted in the introduction. As with the cases of the Uighur minority group in western China and the Malay Muslims in southern Thailand, the rhetorical use of kin group comparisons as part of their political mobilization strategies may be a widespread phenomenon. If these material disparities are associated with rebellious activity, then maybe the dynamic is manifesting in numerous cases other than these two. The next step for future research is to analyze other cases of minority group political activity to see whether kin group comparisons are being used for mobilization purposes. The disparity data can help identify likely or unlikely cases of this.

The second mode of interpretation is that the statistical results establish or suggest an empirical regularity that now stands in need of explanation. Given the non-experimental nature of this research (which is true for most social science), causation cannot be definitively determined. However, one plausible reason why this empirical regularity exists can be seen from our brief discussion of the mobilization mechanism with the Uighurs and Malay Muslims above. Given that the correlation of interest holds even after controlling for other variables, the regularity cannot be easily explained with reference to other more common dynamics in the literature.

Having said that, we acknowledge that this article has limitations. One concerns the use of the Minority At Risk dataset. As a dataset that focuses on the groups that have already been mobilizing, all other groups that have not been politically active have effectively been excluded from our analysis. Thus, our analysis has selected cases on the dependent variable, in that no groups with no political mobilization have been included (even though there is substantial variation in our dependent variable for the cases selected). This means that our results may not apply to the transition from no mobilization to mobilization. Also, the data analysis in the article is from pooled regression and does not allow for time variation. The dependent variable is averaged out across multiple years, representing a more coarse-grained measure of mobilization than a year-by-year measurement. Also, GeoEPR is cross-sectional, with no additional information on the possible movement of these ethnic groups across time. The findings thus may not generalize to more precise, dynamic changes in the situation of ethnic groups.

Second, it is impossible to tell the direction of the causation simply from looking at our regression results. That is, there is a potential endogeneity problem, meaning that we can think of a plausible causal link between rebellion and economic disparity, whereby rebellion is the cause of the disparity. Without better quality data, or a suitable instrumental variable, this is not an issue that we can address here. Instead, this issue can only be addressed through studying sequencing in case studies.

Finally, we also realize that the relationship between ethnic groups and their external kin should be more interactive and more dynamic than our model on economic differences alone can allow. One alternative explanation for any link between relative kin group wealth and ethnic political mobilization is the amount of support—politically, financially and militarily—the wealthier external kin groups are able to provide. That is, a poorer external kin cannot provide as much support as a richer external kin, which might explain why the group mobilizes when external kin are relatively wealthy. Indeed, we acknowledge that the support that an ethnic group garners externally can substantially affect the security dilemma between the group and the majority group (Lake and Rothchild, 1998). However, owing to data limitations, we cannot effectively test this crucial alternative explanation in our empirical analysis. However, we do not think this alternative explanation necessarily undermines

our theoretical framework. In reality, the mechanism about perception of relative well-being that we propose in this article should work in tangent with external support to effectively catalyze ethnic group mobilization. Future research is needed to combine the two levels of analysis.

## Conclusion

We started our article with a discussion of the relationship between economic factors and ethnic group mobilization. Participating in the literature on horizontal inequalities and ethnic group political mobilization, we posit instead that we can conceptualize a different type of economic inequality outside of the conventional domestic setting—that is, the economic disparity between ethnic groups and their external kin groups. We argue that an ethnic group's perception of their economic well-being and subsequently their political grievance is based upon a comparison between itself and its external kin. Our focus thus offers a fresh angle to explore the impact of economic disparities outside of the domestic dimension. We argue that, if the ethnic minority group perceives that its external kin enjoys better living standards, then the group is more likely to feel deprived and thus is more likely to mobilize to demand more from the current home state. The results of the statistical tests, controlling for grievance and opportunity variables, have supported the primary hypothesis. That is, when the economic disparity between an ethnic minority group and its wealthier external kin increases, the intensity of group mobilization decreases.

Our finding supports the general approach on ethnic mobilization that focuses on external kin relations. In our case, we demonstrate that external kin groups can be crucial reference points for ethnic groups in their evaluations of living standards. These evaluations subsequently provide permissive conditions for group grievance construction and political mobilization. This study indicates that economic inequality can be perceived outside of the domestic setting and calls for future empirical case studies focusing on how this comparative economy framework works out in ethnic groups' preference formation.

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## Notes

1. For a discussion on how ethnic groups consider their kin in other states when making politically relevant decisions, see Moore and Shellman (2004) and Rubin and Moore (2007).
2. There is one extant study on civil war and another on ethnic conflict. The two are clearly related, but in some important ways they remain distinct. In this article, since our primary concern is with ethnic groups with external kin, we are mainly engaged with the literature on ethnic conflict. We are interested in the role economic inequality plays in conflicts where ethnicity is the primary group-defining indicator. We do not think ethnic group action is based on ethnicity alone, and other political and economic factors need to be included to understand ethnic group political mobilization.
3. This hypothesis posits a correlation between actual levels of economic disparity and mobilization. If the mechanism is playing out in any particular case, then we should see explicit articulations of grievance based on comparisons between the minority group and their external kin. These

articulations might be expressed as part of a mobilization strategy by elites or as ground-level sentiment. However, in order to determine if this mechanism is working, we need to engage in detailed discourse analysis of elites' speeches or a detailed field study of the group of interest, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

4. Compiled by Wimmer et al. (2009), the dataset identifies 722 "politically relevant ethnic groups".
5. The variable in MAR that identifies whether a group has external relations or not is GC10. The coding of the variable is as follows: 1—the group has no close kindred across an international border; 2—the group has close kindred across a border that does not adjoin its regional base; 3—the group has no close kindred in countries that adjoin its regional base; 4—the group has close kindred in one country that adjoins its regional base; and 5—the group has close kindred in more than one country that adjoins its regional base. All ethnic groups with values other than 1 have been included in this analysis.
6. G-Econ data can be accessed at <http://gecon.yale.edu/>. See also Cederman et al. (2011) for their use of G-Econ data. While data for 1995 and 2000 are available, Cederman et al. (2011) find that the figures for these years are estimates for updated population figures for the respective years, and contain no independent economic data over the 1990 values.
7. For an introduction of the GeoEPR dataset, see Wucherpfennig et al. (2011).
8. EPR dataset can be accessed at <http://www.icr.ethz.ch/research/epr>
9. The exact coding of the dependent variable is as follows: 0—none reported; 1—political banditry, sporadic terrorism; 2—campaigns of terrorism; 3—local rebellions; 4—small-scale guerrilla activity; 5—intermediate guerrilla activity; 6—large-scale guerrilla activity; and 7—protracted civil war. An alternative dependent variable would be to assess whether a rebellion was due to ethnic conflict or not. The Ethnic Armed Conflict dataset (EAC), based on the Armed Conflict Dataset, provides such a categorization (Cederman et al., 2010a). We choose to use the MAR indicator however since EAC's categorization of ethnic conflict only identifies ethnic-driven conflicts at the country level, not at the group level. Since this approach does not target group-level conflict, the indicator may capture ethnic conflict that is irrelevant to a particular ethnic group.
10. We did not use the variables on political and economic discrimination (POLDIS, ECODIS) because these two variables are only for the post 1980 years.
11. State per capita GDP data obtained from the World Development Indicators from the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>) and the National Accounts Main Aggregates Database from the United Nations Statistics Division (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/selbasicFast.asp>).
12. Five groups that did witness protracted civil war and thus have 7 as the rebellion index value comprise Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia, Serbs in Croatia in 1995, and Armenians living in Azerbaijan during the early 1990s.
13. Data and code for these tests are available in the replication files.
14. There are five categories; mainly rural (>80%), mostly rural (60–80%), mixed urban/rural, mostly urban (60–80%) and mainly urban (>80%).
15. We used the MAR variable Region, with values for the Western Democracies and Japan, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin American and the Caribbean.

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